

Frequently Asked Questions

About State Parks and Reservoirs Group Program Fees

Who pays the fees and how much will they pay?

Groups led by DNR staff. Any group, regardless of age, participating as a part of an educational program scheduled with an interpreter or other staff person at a state park, reservoir, Wyandotte Woods SRA pays \$1/person. This \$1/person is the only cost for the group, regardless of whether the entrance gate is open or not.

Groups led by teachers when the entrance gate is open. Any group entering a state park, reservoir or Wyandotte Woods SRA for a teacher-led program (no DNR staff participation) when the entrance gate is open pays \$1/person. This applies to any group with participants ages 5 and older. If the entrance gate is not open, teacher-led groups will not be charged (this is the same approach we use with other visitors when the entrance gate is not staffed.)

Groups requesting a program at their site/school. Any group requesting an educational program at a school or other location presented by state park, reservoir or Wyandotte Woods SRA staff pays a \$2/person up to a maximum one-day fee of \$500.00. This fee applies to school groups, scout groups, garden clubs, service clubs and other organized groups.

Why are groups required to pay fees?

The staff who lead our field trips and off-site programs are trained in natural and cultural history and in interpretation and education. Teachers and students are provided with a high quality experience during their visit.

Richard Lieber, the founder of the Indiana State Park system and the first director of the Department of Conservation, had a strong belief in a “user pays” approach to managing public parks and recreation areas. This philosophy has sustained our state parks and reservoirs through nearly a century of economic ups and downs. Currently, 80% of our budget comes from user fees. Only 20% comes from legislative appropriations (tax dollars). This is a significant change for us. In the past, the percentages were much more evenly distributed between user fees and legislative appropriations. We are actively working to be more self-sufficient so that our funding levels are stable even when the state’s fiscal situation causes reductions in our legislatively appropriated funds. We see approximately 80,000 students, Scouts and other groups annually. The group program fee will provide additional revenue to support our interpretive and education staff and programs.

Can we still apply for an educational gate waiver?

No. The educational gate waiver has been eliminated in an effort to reduce paperwork and ensure that the program fee is applied fairly.

If waivers are no longer available, do we have to pay a gate fee and a program fee?

No. Any group that pays the program fee does **not** pay a gate fee. The total per person charge for a visit with an organized group is \$1/person. The commercial vehicle (bus) gate fee is \$1/person and this group program fee essentially replaces that commercial vehicle fee for groups.

Can our group perform a service project in lieu of a program fee?

In general, no. We encourage groups to volunteer for service projects, but it is logistically difficult for us provide service projects for school or other large groups in lieu of a program fee because of staff preparation time, materials and equipment required for service projects and because of the large number of groups with which we work. If the primary purpose of the group visit is a service project (for example, an Eagle Scout project) a program may be requested as a part of the preparation for the project and the fee may be waived. Requests such as this are evaluated by the property manager at each site based on group size and staff/project availability.

If a group is teacher-led and no DNR staff is involved, why is a fee required?

We encourage groups to visit our properties and explore our sites. These groups are using trails, restroom facilities, picnic shelters, playground equipment and other resources that must be maintained. The \$1/person user fee provides additional operational dollars to help maintain the natural, cultural and physical resources at our properties.

When will groups begin paying these fees?

The group program fees will be implemented on January 1, 2004. Any group scheduled for a program after that date will be required to pay the group fees.

How will the fees be collected?

It is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that cash or a single check with the total fee is presented at the entrance gate or to the staff leading the program on the day of the program. An invoice can be provided if needed, and property staff will provide a receipt on the day of the visit.

DNR

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Are there any exceptions to this group fee?

Service clubs or other organizations with whom we have or may be forming partnerships are not charged the off site (\$2/person) fee for presentations promoting the site. This decision will be made by the property manager.

Presentations for off-site groups that are primarily promotional in nature will not require a fee. (For example, a talk about “What’s New” at a property for a service club would not require payment of a fee, but a talk about a natural or cultural history topic such as mosquitoes, bats, or the Underground Railroad would require payment of a fee.)

Schools or other groups who work with the property interpreter to set up pre-trip classroom visits prior to a property visit will only be charged for an on-site program at the property. A pre-trip classroom visit includes content that focuses primarily on what the group members can expect during their field trip. (Pre-trip classroom visits may be requested at any property, but are not always possible for every group due to staff availability.)

No group program fee is charged for workshops that have funding from other sources. This includes programs such as Project WILD and Project Learning Tree Workshops, Project WET and Hoosier Riverwatch, Hunter Education, Boater Education, etc.

The DNR director and his/her designee(s) has the option to waive fees for certain justifiable property events.

What if a student cannot pay?

We do not want any student to miss a field trip or program at his/her school because the child cannot afford it. First, check with your principal or your PTO to see if funds are available from those sources. Some schools raise the funds for field trips by collecting aluminum cans or selling items. Some local service clubs will assist with field trip funding. If no school or other funding sources are available, we will waive the fee for any student who is receiving a free school lunch.

I don’t want to put a student on the spot who can’t pay. How will you know how to waive fees?

We will provide each teacher who asks with a simple form that documents the number of students for whom fee waivers are requested. Again, this is only for students who are receiving a free school lunch. The form will not ask for names or other personal information. This form will be turned in when the check is presented at the entrance gate or to the interpreter.

What will the money be used for?

Funds collected will be deposited in the dedicated account for each division, and for state parks and reservoirs will become a part of that 80% of our funding mentioned above. This will be used specifically to move toward restoring pre-budget-crisis seasonal interpretive positions at several of our properties. In addition, a portion of the funds in state parks and reservoirs will be used to develop pre and post trip materials, correlation of field trip content to the state science/history standards and classroom curriculum materials related to the history and purpose of the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs and the DNR.

How did you decide how much to charge?

We talked informally with many teachers who currently use our services. We contacted a number of other states. Six other state natural resource agencies are currently charging program fees. We talked with many Indiana city and county parks systems to determine an appropriate fee. We looked at a variety of options ranging from \$1/person to \$4/person. We sent our proposal to all of the teachers with whom we have worked in the last year and asked for comment. The vast majority were supportive of the fee or at least did not see it as a problem, particularly if we provided an option for waiving fees based on the free school lunch program where needed.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

Contact the interpreter or property manager at the state park or reservoir where you plan to visit. If you have questions or comments about the fee structure, you can contact the Chief Interpreter at 317-232-4143.

I understand that these fees also apply at the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites.

Yes, they do. The fees will be implemented at the Indiana State Museum with the 2004/2005 school year. You can obtain more information about scheduling a program at the Indiana State Museum by visiting the website www.IN.gov/ism. Most Historic Sites currently ask for a \$1/person donation for groups.

Teacher Resources On the Web



The Department of Natural Resources offers several resources and websites to support educators. Go to www.IN.gov/dnr and click on “Education” for more info.

State Parks and Reservoirs Teacher Resource Guide is available at www.IN.gov/dnr/parklake/pdf/teacherbooklet.pdf. This guide provides an overview of our site resources and themes, and lists contact numbers for scheduling field trips.

Look for downloadable activities for students on the “Just for Kids” page of the State Parks and Reservoirs webpage at www.IN.gov/dnr/parklake/interpretiveservices/kids

The Natural Resources Education Center provides workshops and resources for teachers statewide at www.IN.gov/dnr/nrec.